

## Kosmas Leads Delegation Letter Urging Secretary Vilsack to Tour Freeze-Damaged Florida Crops

Reiterates Her Call for a Quick USDA Disaster Declaration

January 20, 2010

(Washington, DC) — Today, Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24) led a bipartisan group of Florida lawmakers in encouraging Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to tour areas of the state damaged by the recent sustained freezing temperatures. The letter, signed by 20 members of the Florida Congressional Delegation, encourages Secretary Vilsack to see first-hand the damage caused by one of the longest stretches of freezing temperatures in Florida's history.

Kosmas recently voiced her support for a quick USDA disaster declaration for Florida to provide relief to Central Florida farms and growers whose crops have been damaged by recent freezing temperatures. According to Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Charles Bronson, the thirteen days of sustained hours of below freezing temperatures caused enough damage to qualify all 67 Florida counties for a disaster declaration.

"As farmers continue to assess the full extent of the damage, it is clear that the recent freezing temperatures have had a significant impact on Central Florida's agricultural industry, which is incredibly important to our local economy," said Congresswoman Kosmas. "I encourage Secretary Vilsack to visit the damaged areas and meet face-to-face with farmers to gain a better understanding of the damage, and I urge him to quickly approve the request for a USDA disaster declaration."

The 20 bipartisan cosigners of Kosmas's letter included nine Democrats and eleven Republicans from across the State of Florida.

The letter full text of the letter can be found below:

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you assess the impact of recent severe weather on Florida's agricultural crops, we are writing to invite you to visit areas in the state affected by the sustained freezing temperatures. We hope you can take time out of your schedule to see first-hand the damage caused by one of the longest stretches of freezing temperatures in Florida's history.

While we are aware that the USDA's Farm Service Agency continues to study specific crop damage assessments, initial reports by the Florida Department of Agriculture indicate significant harm to Florida agriculture, the second largest industry in the state. Despite the best efforts of farmers and others invested in the industry, the reports suggest hundreds of millions of dollars in damages and the loss of at least 30% of the state's crops.

Damage to Florida's agricultural industry means serious repercussions for farmers, nursery owners and consumers in the state. We are confident that the opportunity to meet face-to-face with them will provide you with a better sense of the devastating impact of the extended freezing temperatures on the state's economy. Moreover, your presence would confirm the Administration's commitment to aiding a swift and successful recovery for Florida's agricultural businesses.

Thank you for your consideration of this serious matter paramount to Florida's agricultural industry and the millions of Americans that benefit from it. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Kosmas (D-FL-24)

Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-09)

Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL-05)

Corrine Brown (D-FL-03)

Allen Boyd (D-FL-02)

Vern Buchanan (R-FL-13)

Kathy Castor (D-FL-11)

Ander Crenshaw (R-FL-04)

Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL-21)

Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL-25)

Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL-23)

Alan Grayson (D-FL-08)

Ron Klein (D-FL-22)

Kendrick B. Meek (D-FL-17)

John Mica (R-FL-07)

Adam H. Putnam (R-FL-12)

Bill Posey (R-FL-15)

Tom Rooney (R-FL-16)

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL-18)

Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL-20)